

Sub-theme: Commerce &amp; Industry

Sub-theme: Architecture

also: Military and Political Affairs

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

For consideration as a National  
Historic Landmark

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

United States Mint, New Orleans Branch

AND/OR COMMON

Old United States Mint

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

420 Esplanade Avenue

\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

New Orleans

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
1st

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Louisiana

CODE

COUNTY

Orleans Parish

CODE

**3 CLASSIFICATION****CATEGORY**

\_\_ DISTRICT

☒ BUILDING(S)

\_\_ STRUCTURE

\_\_ SITE

\_\_ OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**☒ PUBLIC

\_\_ PRIVATE

\_\_ BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

\_\_ IN PROCESS

\_\_ BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

\_\_ OCCUPIED

☒ UNOCCUPIED☒ WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE**☒ YES: RESTRICTED

\_\_ YES: UNRESTRICTED

\_\_ NO

**PRESENT USE**

\_\_ AGRICULTURE

\_\_ MUSEUM

\_\_ COMMERCIAL

\_\_ PARK

\_\_ EDUCATIONAL

\_\_ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

\_\_ ENTERTAINMENT

\_\_ RELIGIOUS

☒ GOVERNMENT

\_\_ SCIENTIFIC

\_\_ INDUSTRIAL

\_\_ TRANSPORTATION

\_\_ MILITARY

\_\_ OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

State of Louisiana - Louisiana State Museum

STREET &amp; NUMBER

751 Chartres Street

CITY, TOWN

New Orleans

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Louisiana

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Conveyance Office, Civil Courts Building, Orleans Parish

STREET &amp; NUMBER

421 Loyola Avenue

CITY, TOWN

New Orleans

STATE

Louisiana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Vieux Carre Survey (Microfilmed) (See continuation sheet)

DATE

1961-1966

☒ FEDERAL \_\_ STATE \_\_ COUNTY \_\_ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Tulane University Library, 6823 St. Charles Avenue

CITY, TOWN

New Orleans

STATE

Louisiana

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT  
☐ GOOD  
☒ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED  
☐ RUINS  
☐ UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED  
☒ ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE  
☐ MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The United States Branch Mint occupies an entire block bounded by Barracks Street, North Peters Street, Decatur Street and Esplanade Avenue. The main entrance is on Esplanade. A complete description of specifications exists (16 pages) and four original Strickland drawings in ink and watercolors are in the Louisiana State Museum Archives. The exterior retains most of its original design including a wrought iron fence with a spearhead motif mounted on a 2-foot granite base enclosing the grounds.

Constructed of river-mud brick stuccoed over with cement plaster and trimmed with granite on the exterior (the base water table, belt course at first floor level, the pilasters in the central bay and at the corners of the building). The deep cornice is wood. The facade is enhanced by the projecting central flat roofed portico with four Ionic columns and two square Doric columns to each side. There are entrances on the ground level (called "Basement" in original plan) and second floor (called "Principal floor"). The double steps to the principal level are parallel to the building and are enclosed in granite cheek blocks ascending on each side and meeting over the basement door forming a small porch.

The plan is basically a rectangle that becomes an E-shape with the addition of two L-shaped rear wings. There are galleries on all three floors of these rear wings (piazzas) supported by cast iron columns on the two inner sides which are recessed into the mass of the building. The basement level was designed to accommodate machinery for minting coins, vaults and furnaces. On the principal level the central bay extends through the building to the other side which has a similar gable. This area above the street level contains a large open stair hall and large rooms along the back of the building. The smaller front rooms were designed as offices and vaults and the rear ones were rolling rooms for coinage. The attic story is similar to the ground story in plan and contained rooms for drawing and cutting, steam coining, storage for dies, etc.

The interior has been slightly altered (see Statement of Significance) notably the 1856-59 addition of cast iron columns and beams to shore up arched ceilings. The roof trusses are still intact and are of very unusual construction. The exterior cast iron veranda on the North Peters Street side was added at this time.

The building is monumental in scale - 282 feet along Esplanade Avenue by 81 feet deep. It has more than 90,000 square feet of floor area originally containing more than 65 rooms. It is situated on a landscaped block with trees and a lawn.

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Urban Planning
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

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SPECIFIC DATES	1835-1861	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	William Strickland
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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The United States Branch Mint at New Orleans is the nation's oldest unreconstructed extant mint on its original location. The most prominent of the first branch mints, it illustrates the movement to decentralize the American monetary system. That attempt, reflected in the debate on the establishment of the New Orleans Mint, was indicative of both the rise of Jacksonian Democracy and the sectional debate which would ultimately transmute itself into civil war.

An imposing classic-revival building the branch mint is a representative work of William Strickland (1788-1854). It was begun in 1835 and began functioning in 1838. Occupying an entire block in the northeast quarter of the Vieux Carre on the site of Fort St. Charles, the branch mint anchors the French Quarter at its northeast corner as the New Orleans Custom House, a recently designated national historical landmark anchors the southeast corner.

### History

The turmoil and confusion in the affairs of state under the Articles of Confederation permeated the origins of American currency. Foreign coinage flooded the American market during the Revolution. It was clipped, filed scraped and plugged. So pervasive was the practice that the Continental Congress actually ordered the debasing of a French specie loan of \$470,000. Chaos reigned in the money markets. The dollar was quoted at 108 pennies in New England; 96 pennies in New York City; and 90 pennies in Philadelphia. In New York, quotations of foreign coin were therefore rendered in 96ths; the British guinea quoted at 4 64/96 dollars; the French guinea at 4 52/96 dollars and so on.

Gouverneur Morris early responded with a plan for systematizing the coinage. Jefferson followed with his proposal for a decimal coinage system which he reasserted with the creation of the new Constitutional government. What was really needed was a national mint for standardization of the coin. Alexander Hamilton, champion of American commercialism, was the heaviest promoter of the mint idea. He presented his scheme as Secretary of the Treasury on January 1, 1791. On April 2, the following year, the Congress created the United States Mint and placed the coinage on the decimal system. The first mint was built at Philadelphia-- the first building constructed by the Federal government.

(Continued)

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	5
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7	8	3	9	2	0
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3	3	1	7	9	3	0
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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B 

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C 

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D 

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The building is bounded by the inside curblines of Barracks, North Peters and Decatur Streets and Esplanade Avenue.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Benjamin Levy, Senior Historian and Carolyn Pitts, Principal Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

12/23/74

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

New Orleans

STATE

Louisiana

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL \_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_

LOCAL \_\_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 6

PAGE 1

- 
- (1) TITLE: National Register  
DATE: March 31, 1973 ☒Federal ☒State ☐County ☐Local  
DEPOSITORY: Department of Art, Historical and Cultural Preservation  
Old State Capitol  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70801 504/389-5086
- (2) TITLE: Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS No. LA-1119)  
DATE: Date Sheets (17 pages), 1963 and 1965  
DEPOSITORY: Library of Congress/Annex  
Prints and Photographic Division  
Washington, D.C.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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The U.S. Mint was not an instant success. Congress despaired of its creation. During the first ten years of its life it coined \$2,534,000 or only one-half dollar per capita. Shopkeepers and consumers alike were content to circulate foreign coins. At one time, the House of Representatives noted to abolish the Mint. The senate voted to save it.

Nevertheless, the total coinage steadily grew to \$6,971,000 by 1810 and to \$18,833,000 by 1820. In the next decade \$18,000,000 was coined, equal to all the coinage of the previous thirty years. Pressure for expanded coinage forced the U.S. Mint from its first quarters into a new building constructed at Philadelphia in 1833. It was at this time that the demand arose to create the first branch mints.

Branch Mints: By 1830 gold had been discovered in North Carolina and Georgia. The fever generated by these strikes proved unwarranted, but nevertheless, stimulated a call to establish branch mints near the gold fields. In addition, local politicians argued legitimately that transporting the gold to the central mint in Philadelphia was costly and difficult. In response to these demands Congress established the nations first branch mints--one at Dahlonega, Georgia; another at Charlotte, North Carolina; and yet a third at New Orleans.

Why an additional branch at New Orleans? The argument raised was that New Orleans was the great port of the Mississippi Valley. Its ascendancy as the nation's cotton mart and commercial link to West Indian and South American trade required a local supply of coinage to facilitate commerce.

As valid as all these reasons were, there lay behind this facade of argument deeper considerations that reflected both the growing sectional debate which was to end in civil war and the politics of Jacksonian Democracy illustrated by "Old Andy's" struggle with the Bank of the United States.

In a speech in the Senate, Thomas Hart "Old Buillion" Benton, joined forces with John C. Calhoun and proclaimed New Orleans the natural link between the "great valley" and South America. Therefore, he declared that a branch mint at the great port was "an act of justice to the people of the South and West."<sup>1</sup> Benton stressed the need to permeate the nation with the means for achieving a hard money victory over the "rag system." Calhoun responded that not only was New Orleans entitled to its mint, but that every port should have one.<sup>2</sup> Could he have had Charleston in mind?

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Adolph Meyer, Speech in the House of Representatives, January 11, 1898, Washington, D.C., 1898.

<sup>2</sup> Jesse P. Watson, The Bureau of the Mint: Its History, Activities, and Organization, John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1926, pp. 7-8.

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In addition to this sectional bartering, the debate over the branch banks was probably an extension of Andrew Jackson's fight with the Bank of the United States. In defeating the rechartering of the Bank, Jackson succeeded in decentralizing the monetary system. It has been surmised that the bank struggle stimulated the desire to have the coinage out from under the shadow of Philadelphia financial interests about which there was bitter jealousy.

The Mint at New Orleans: Congress established the New Orleans Mint along with those at Dahlonega and Charlotte in 1835.<sup>3</sup> On January 26, 1861 it was seized by the Confederate government which proceeded to finance its early days with bullion stored there. The Confederacy held the mint for only four months, relinquishing it to Union forces on May 31, 1861. Following the Civil War, coinage was suspended until 1879 and thereafter for the last time in 1909 when the mint was reduced in status to an assay office. Nearly two decades later it was reconstituted as a jail for bootleggers of the prohibition era.

The Mints and their Coinage: It is interesting to compare the value of coinage at the various mints as a means of assessing their financial significance. The following figures show the total value of coinage produced at the first three branch banks as well as total pieces struck:<sup>4</sup>

	<u>Dollar Value</u>	<u>Pieces Struck</u>
New Orleans	\$419,076,513	298,660,000
Dahlonega	1,378,710	6,106,000
Charlotte	1,208,131	5,059,000

Clearly in terms of coinage, the U.S. Branch Mint at New Orleans was the overwhelmingly more productive. It even outproduced the Carson City branch, established after the Civil War by a factor of 5 to 1.

On the other hand, the newer branch mints at Denver and San Francisco as well as the central mint at Philadelphia each outpaced the New Orleans branch in total coinage as seen in the following figures:<sup>5</sup>

1793-1970	Philadelphia	\$48,801,000,000
1906-1970	Denver	53,528,000,000
1854-1955)		
1965-1970)	San Francisco	9,073,000,000

<sup>3</sup> 4 Stat. L., 774; also 5 Stat. L., 147 and 602.

<sup>4</sup> United States Bureau of the Mint, Domestic and Foreign Coins Manufactured by Mints of the United States, 1793-1970, GPO, Washington, D.C., 1972, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

(Continued)

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The mints at Dahlonega and Charlotte were not recommissioned after the Civil War. The mint at Dahlonega was destroyed; the one at Charlotte was dismantled and reassembled on a different location where it serves today as a museum. The demolition of the first three central mints at Philadelphia leaves the branch mint at New Orleans the oldest mint extant on its original location.

Architectural History

The Old United States Branch Mint is an imposing structure designed by William Strickland (1788-1854). Begun in 1835, the building began operating as a Mint in 1838. Built on the site of Fort St. Charles, the Mint occupies an entire block in the North East quarter of the Vieux Carre. It's site is critical; it is the corner of the Historic District and is next to the complex of the restored French Market.

When the earlier Fort was razed in 1826, the area was known as Jackson Square commemorating General Jackson's review of his troops from the ramparts during the War of 1812. In 1856, the Place des Armes in front of St. Louis Cathedral was renamed Jackson Square.

William Strickland prepared the plans apparently referring to his design for the Naval Home in Philadelphia (1826) using the same strong projecting central portico with long wings to the left and right. The building contract was awarded to the local builders John Mitchell and Benjamin F. Fox in 1835. His original Mint in Philadelphia was destroyed in 1907 and the branch Mint in Charlotte, N. C. has been moved from its original site and reconstructed. The New Orleans Branch Mint remains relatively unchanged except for some interior alterations: 1839 James Gallier Sr. iron rods were inserted to shore up the arches as the building settled; 1856-7 General P. T. G. Beauregard oversaw fireproofing. Iron beams, iron roof trusses and corrugated iron replaced the wooden roof (this was the first sheet metal roof used in the South). The smoke stack was removed as defective; 1858-64 the cast iron gallery was added on the river flank as an amenity for the resident superintendent. 1931 Remodelled as a Federal prison for short term bootleggers by the firm of Diboll & Owen, architects. Pre-Fab cell blocks were added in the wings (floor removed), the 1858 smoke stack was removed, exercise yards and walls were added. 1943-65 U.S. Coast Guard Receiving Center. Interior 1850 roof was replaced, excessive painting on interior.

The Branch Mint is the oldest public building in New Orleans in the Greek Revival style and one of the largest in the Deep South.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

Architecture:

1. Curtis, Nathaniel Courtlandt, New Orleans, Its Old Houses, Shops and Public Buildings. Philadelphia and London, 1933 (pp. 206-207).
2. Federal Writers' Project. New Orleans City Guide. Boston, 1938 (p. 252).
3. Gilchrist, Agnes Addison. William Strickland, Architect and Engineer, 1780-1854. Philadelphia, 1950. (pp. 11, 58, 91, pl 31).
4. Hamlin, Talbot Faulkner. Greek Revival Architecture in America. London, New York, etc. 1944. (pp. 79, 229).
5. Louisiana State University, Department of Architecture. A History of the United States Mint, New Orleans, Louisiana. A paper prepared for Baton Rouge Bureau for Lath and Plaster by Charles J. Collins, Jr. 1970. Printing Office, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
6. Wilson, Samuel, Jr. A Guide to the Architecture of New Orleans, 1699-1959. New York, 1959. (p. 24).

History:

1. Hoggson, Noble Foster, Epochs in American Banking, (John Day Co: New York), 1929.
2. Meyer, Adolph, Speech in the House of Representatives January 11, 1898 Washington, D.C.) 1898.
3. United States Bureau of the Mint, Domestic and Foreign Coins Manufactured by Mints of the United States, 1793-1970, (GPO: Washington, D.C.), 1972.
4. Watson, Jesse P. The Bureau of the Mint: Its History, Activities and Organization, (John Hopkins Press: Baltimore), 1926.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

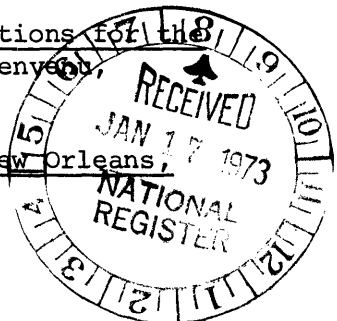
(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Louisiana	
COUNTY	
Orleans Parish	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	MAR 30 1973

(Number all entries)

**Item # 9: Bibliographical References:**

1. Arthur, Stanley Clisby. Old New Orleans. New Orleans, 1936. (p.246)
2. Curtis, Nathaniel Cortlandt. New Orleans - Its Old Houses, Shops and Public Buildings. Philadelphia and London, 1933. (pp. 206-207)
3. Federal Writers' Project. New Orleans City Guide. Boston, 1938. (p.252)
4. Fossier, Albert A. New Orleans. The Glamour Period, 1800-1840. New Orleans, 1957. (pp. 17-18, 20)
5. Gibson, John. Gibson's Guide and Directory of the State of Louisiana. New Orleans, 1838. (p. 328)
6. Gilchrist, Agnes Addison. William Strickland, Architect and Engineer, 1780-1854. Philadelphia, 1950. (p. 91, pl. 31)
7. Hamlin, Talbot Faulkner. Greek Revival Architecture in America. London, New York, etc. 1944. (pp. 79, 229)
8. Hinton, Isaac T. (pub.) A Brief Description of the United States Mint. New Orleans, 1880.
9. Jewell, Edwin L. Jewell's Crescent City Illustrated. New Orleans, 1873. (p. 258, illus.)
10. Owen, Allison. The Old New Orleans Mint Building. In: Louisiana Engineering Society. Proceedings. V. 17, no. 6, Dec. 1931. (pp.278-296)
11. Ridell, John Leonard. The Branch Mint at New Orleans, with an Account of the Process of Coinage and Facsmile Impressions of the Coins Manufactured. New Orleans, 1847.
12. Tulane University of Louisiana. School of Architecture. The Mint. (New Orleans, 1971)
13. U.S. Bureau of the Mint, New Orleans. General Regulations for the United States Branch Mint, New Orleans (by Charles Bienvenu, Superintendent) New Orleans, 1854.
14. Wilson, Samuel, Jr. A Guide to the Architecture of New Orleans, 1699-1959. New York, 1959. (p. 24)



# SKETCH OF SQUARE

SHOWING

CAMERA POINTS FROM WHICH SHOTS WERE TAKEN,  
NUMBERS REFER TO THOSE ON THE PICTURES, AND BROKEN LINES  
THE SCOPE OF THE SHOT.

N. T. S.

